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February 5, 1992

CONFIDENTIAL

TO: ARA - B. Aronson

FROM: ARA/AND - Anne. W. Patterson

SUBJECT: Venezuela in the Wake of the Coup

The public order situation has returned to normal and most businesses were open as usual on February 5. The coup death toll appears to be around 70 killed and several hundred wounded. About 14 of the dead were reportedly loyalists, one was a civilian bystander, and the rest rebels. One American citizen was caught in cross fire and suffered a minor shrapnel wound.

Around 1,000 persons have been arrested for complicity in the coup, according to the GOV, including several lieutenant colonels who appear to have been key leaders. An army general passed over for a command was also arrested for suspected complicity. Coup plotters are to be tried by military courts.

Venezuelan press reports indicate that coup leaders justified their actions by citing the difficult economic conditions of many Venezuelans and CAP's supposed willingness to make concessions on the Gulf of Venezuela maritime boundry dispute with Colombia. Venezuela's recent economic growth has been slow to trickle down, seriously undermining confidence in Venezuela's democratic system. In January, however, CAP attempted to counter this by announcing a social "mega-project" designed to improve the living conditions of Venezuela's poor. CAP has given no indication that a maritime boundry settlement is imminent. Although he has worked hard to improve relations with Colombia, CAP recently made strong public remarks reaffirming Venezuela's claim to the Gulf.

Venezuelan press reports suggest the GOV may have had limited advance knowledge that a coup was in the works. (One reporter tells us that Defense Minister Ochoa admitted to her that he knew something was afoot as of 2:00 P.M. on Monday. Ochoa said he immediately ordered additional measures to protect CAP, but that the GOV was surprised at the size of the uprising.) According to one version of events, plotters were waiting to kill or capture CAP at the airport (he was arriving from Europe), but CAP's plane was purposefully diverted to a gate which it does not normally use. CAP then fled to his residence until it was assaulted and taken by the rebels. He then fled to the presidential palace, which was also assaulted and captured. CAP, his identity hidden behind an overcoat, fled through a secret exit to a TV station.

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Box 5
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